

Bioethics in Anatomy Education Resources:

Defining and Exploring Ethics and Bioethics

Description:

This set of slides provides information around ethics and ethical concepts that is useful in understanding how these may influence the practice of anatomy. It describes the difference between ethical and legal frameworks, explores the difference between morals and ethics, and highlights the use of ethical guidelines. It clarifies the difference between ethics and bioethics.

The topics covered by this resource include:

Ethics and Morals
Law
Ethical guidelines

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Further reading:

Hope T, Hope R, Fulford K, Yates A. The Oxford Practice Skills Course: Ethics, Law, and Communication Skills in Healthcare Education. Oxford University Press on Demand. 1996.
Bruns F, Chelouche T. Lectures on Inhumanity: Teaching Medical Ethics in German Medical Schools Under Nazism. Annals of Internal Medicine 2017;166(8):591-596.

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What is the difference between 'Ethics' and 'Law'?

The **laws** of a country, region, territory or state are the **rules and regulations** that seek to influence behavior of persons for the common good. They are formulated and enforced by governments, and violation usually leads to penalties.

Ethics, and therefore ethical guidelines, are **principles** that guide how people in a community may appropriately undertake or conduct certain activities. They suggest how people should conform to standards and assist people in deciding what may be right or wrong behavior. There are not generally punishments associated with contravening ethical guidelines. Ethics both inform and assist the development of laws.



Identify and compare the different laws and guidelines that apply to the practice of anatomy in your location. How do these differ? How do they complement each other, or overlap?

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How are 'Morals' Different from 'Ethics'?

Ethical guidelines are different from moral positions or points of view. A widely accepted definition is that **ethics** represent a collective agreement or set of shared values of a community, while **morals** represent a personal position or point of view.



While the moral position of an individual may be represented within **ethical guidelines**, it does not have to be. Similarly, while most ethical guidelines are likely moral, they do not have to be.

An example of a moral point of view differing from ethical guidelines include someone believing that public dissection of a consented body donor is appropriate, in opposition to ethical guidelines from within the anatomy community which state it is not appropriate.

In the teaching of anatomy, are there other examples where morals and ethics may appear to conflict with each other?

One historical example of immoral ethics can be found in medical ethics in Nazi Germany (Bruns and Chelouche, 2017). Are there other examples where ethical guidelines may be immoral?

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What are 'Ethical Guidelines'?

Ethical guidelines are a set of rules developed by a community to serve the needs of that community in a way that represents their values. They are a collective statement of what that community believes constitutes appropriate behavior; setting standards and highlighting how persons should conform in particular situations or environments.

While there are generally no penalties associated with violation of ethical guidelines, the consequences of disobeying ethical guidelines may be that these actions are considered for sanctions by professional associations or employers.



When would the development of ethical guidelines be appropriate or necessary?

What areas of anatomy practice could require ethical guidelines?

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What's in a name? 'Ethics' vs. 'Bioethics'

The term 'ethics' is often used synonymously with its close relative 'bioethics' when the practice of anatomy is discussed, however, there is a key difference. Bioethics is a subgroup of ethics that deals specifically with the fields of biology and medicine, and therefore this term is often used when speaking about body donation.

Using the term 'ethics' or 'bioethics' in different settings is likely determined by popular or common usage. For instance, in a conversation related to anatomy or body donation, the term 'bioethics' is most likely used, but 'ethical guidelines' are often referred to, as opposed to the term 'bioethical guidelines', which is probably more correct.

Should the term 'bioethics' be always used when discussing anatomical ethics and professionalism, or are there instances where the broader term 'ethics' is more appropriate?



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